Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific and Regional Conversation with SDG Innovators: Shaping our Future Together (Hybrid Meeting), Monday 26 October 2020

Introduction

In January 2020, the Secretary General of the United Nations launched the UN75 initiative as a worldwide conversation about current global challenges, and the gap between the future we want and the current progress. The Anniversary also comes at the critical juncture of a new decade to advance towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the recovery from an unprecedented global health crisis coupled with severe economic and social impacts. The need for innovative solutions and stronger cooperation across all stakeholders is clear.

The event brought together different perspectives of stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific to on the 75-year journey of the United Nations, on its role in building cooperation across countries and people, and on the pathway towards sustainable development by 2030 and a better future post COVID-19.

The Commemoration started with a flag raising ceremony and followed by opening remarks by Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Ms. Gita Sabharwal, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Thailand and H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thailand. Dignitaries, eminent persons, former UN staff members, volunteers and people from across Asia and the Pacific also shared messages reflecting on the 75-year journey of the United Nations and the way forward.

The second part of the event brought together a dynamic panel discussion by six trailblazing innovators sharing their journeys of innovation and what is needed to meaningful changes to take root. They include Aeloi Technologies Co-Founder Ms. Sonika Manandhar, Ricult Thailand Co-Founder and CEO Mr. Aukrit Unahalekhaka, Women’s Entrepreneurship Development Fund Founder Ms. Asel Kubanychbekova, Fusion Hub Founder Ms. Sagufta Janif, MOTIONECO Founder and CEO Mr. Shutong Liu and Indonesian Member of Parliament Ms. Dyah Roro Esti Widya Putri.
Key take-aways

(1) The past 75 years have witnessed a **remarkable transformation** in Asia and the Pacific, which has connected countries and people, pulled millions out of poverty, and laid the foundations for a future driven by digital and technological innovation.

(2) **Much more still needs to be done** to put the region on track to achieving sustainable development and to recovering from the devastating COVID-19 pandemic. The region is still vulnerable to severe climate related disasters, a major contributor to runaway climate change, and has yet to provide equal opportunities for all. These challenges are increasingly of global and regional scale, cutting across national boundaries and therefore require the force of multilateral cooperation and actions.

(3) **The role of the UN is as relevant today as it was 75 years ago.** In the face of multilateral challenges, the unifying role of the UN is needed more than ever to support countries and people in charting a sustainable pathway, bringing innovative ideas into fruition, and forging new partnerships across the board.

(4) **Regional cooperation is essential to address the growing transboundary challenges.** It will be needed to not only build connectivity and deepen economic cooperation and trade but to drive synergistic solutions to the interconnected crises of today including climate change.

(5) **The region is witnessing a momentum of change**, driven by a myriad of innovative solutions by its young population. The discussion highlighted the potentials of digital and new technology and partnerships in accomplishing the dual mission of uplifting lives of the most vulnerable and fighting the climate crisis. Challenges remain for these innovations to scale up their impacts. They range from the lack of direct support to social innovation, difficult access to financing opportunities, and the absence of innovation learning in the education system.

(6) **The pace of change is, however, very slow.** While economies and societies are taking incremental steps towards sustainable development, they are nowhere near the scope and scale required. There is a need to increase the level of ambition and assert a stronger sense of urgency in the decisions and actions of individuals, businesses and governments.
Recommendations

The remarks, video messages and panel discussion at the event highlighted the following recommendations:

(1) The United Nations will need to use its unique platform to bring together countries, peoples and stakeholders to jointly design and partner in scaling up real actions. The multilateral challenges of today will require countries and people to commit to the common ideals of the United Nations and multilateral cooperation. The power of partnerships and cooperation will be central to make “the future we want” possible.

(2) Tap into the power of innovation and bring it to a larger scale. Elements for meaningful changes to take root include direct support to social enterprises in testing and replicating solutions, an education system which encourages innovation and change, and partnerships between the public and private sector to raise the level of ambition in climate actions and leave no one behind.

(3) Change starts with individuals, especially the young generation. Everyday decisions make a difference in the fight against climate change. Every person’s skill is needed to create a better life for all.

(4) Courageous decisions and transformative actions are needed by governments and parliaments to accelerate the wheels of change. It is a transformational approach that is needed of governments and parliaments to set course for an inclusive and sustainable future in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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